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Mrs Heather Freeman  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Freeman

### **Short inspection of George Street Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 3 March 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in February 2011.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Soon after taking up post in September 2015, you identified the strengths of the school and where further improvement could be achieved. With the support of governors, you are effectively addressing the key priorities of the school's improvement plan. Parents praise the school. They feel that you are highly approachable and totally dedicated to making it even better. The 98 parents who expressed their views through Parent View (Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents) are overwhelmingly positive about the school. A further 20 sent additional comments. A few are worried about the high turnover of staff this year but most are very complimentary, particularly about the commitment, skills and expertise of the teachers and about the important role the school plays in the local community.

Staff in the early years work very hard to give children a good start at school. The skilful teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds that they make), the shared learning sessions for parents and carers and the partnership with the local children's centre and nurseries are some of the many initiatives that are leading to accelerated progress in the Nursery and Reception classes. The daily 'active listening' and good classroom routines lead to exemplary behaviour. Consequently, children are well prepared for transition to Year 1.

The excellent behaviour of pupils continues as they get older. When I asked pupils

whether their school was good, they disagreed because 'it is not good, it is amazing'. Pupils are very proud of their school and aim to achieve the 'Pot of Gold' rewarding best behaviour. Pupils are interested to learn and keen to discuss their work with their friends, their teachers and visitors. The school's vision, 'Where Learning Comes Alive', was clearly evidenced during this visit. Pupils say that staff make learning fun. They hope to access the additional resources in the 'Big Bus' parked in the school playground more often when the weather gets better. They like the many opportunities they have to join clubs, do competitive sporting activities and take responsibilities, such as through the young leaders' programme or speaking at conferences. The staff's contribution to pupils' personal development and general well-being is a strength of the school.

You quickly spotted that in some areas, such as the difference in achievement between groups of pupils in writing, progress was not always consistently good across all years and subjects. Your analysis of performance information, supplemented by the robust challenge of the local authority's school improvement partner, enable you to take prompt action where it matters most, for example to improve mathematics and boys' writing. A range of initiatives are ensuring that the progress of current pupils is accelerating. Increasing the rate of progress of the most-able pupils, including those who are in receipt of additional funding, requires further work because, in some classes and subjects, expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough. The local authority advisers are helping staff to review the quality of their work in literacy and mathematics. Effective practice, such as the challenge groups for able mathematicians in Year 6, should be shared more widely across year groups.

You welcome the expert guidance of the consultant headteacher and governors. They are helping you to manage the forthcoming changes to your senior leadership team. The consultant headteacher is experienced and you are making the most of her advice while developing your own style of leadership. You are checking the quality of teaching and learning frequently and providing staff with clear action for improvement. The frequent pupils' progress meetings are improving the accuracy of assessment and informing the setting of challenging targets. Teaching assistants have a key role to play in raising standards. They are highly committed to supporting those who have gaps in their learning. Their work is most effective when teaching is well planned and expectations of what all pupils can achieve are high. Further training is required to make sure that teaching is of the highest quality across all subjects of the curriculum. This is particularly important as several staff are taking on new areas of responsibility.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding arrangements are robust. You ensure that all staff and governors undertake relevant training. The inclusion manager is new to the school. She is developing effective links with external agencies to provide support for pupils. She knows the families well and ensures that the very small number of children in need of intensive support are helped so that their education does not suffer at times of crisis. Your staff are fully aware of what to do if there is a safeguarding concern. You are seeking professional advice to manage the very small number of pupils who

have very challenging behaviour needs. Staff are receiving specialist training to meet the needs of pupils who have severe autism.

A few parents are concerned about low-level bullying. Pupils say that bad behaviour is not tolerated and that any issues are dealt with quickly. They explained that they would have no hesitation in telling an adult if they were worried about anything. I checked the school's records and observed behaviour at break and lunchtime. I found that pupils were well supervised and played together sensibly.

## **Inspection findings**

- The governors bring a wealth of expertise to the school and several members have direct experience of working in education. Governors use a range of performance information to hold the school to account and improve outcomes. They now need to check whether staff training and the monitoring of teaching are raising standards consistently across all years and subjects. They have the necessary expertise to recruit high-quality staff and the current recruitment for a new deputy headteacher is well managed.
- The positive impact of your leadership is particularly visible in your relentless focus on ensuring pupils' well-being, your use of pupils' progress meetings to set challenging targets for further improvement and the positive links you are developing with parents and carers. Staff new to the school, including teachers new to the profession, are highly complimentary of the support they are getting at the school. You acknowledge that staff training and your evaluation of teaching have not yet had a sufficiently positive impact across all year groups.
- With the effective support of the early years team you are ensuring that children with low levels of development on entry to Nursery and Reception improve rapidly. Children in Reception get off to a flying start and you rightly want to consolidate the progress of boys in the early years because the proportion reaching a good level of development was below that of girls in July 2015. Current children are making rapid progress and are well prepared for Year 1.
- In 2015, results in the phonics checks were below average at the end of Year 1. The systematic phonics programme you introduced this year is making a difference. Staff are raising their expectation and current pupils are doing well. The proportion of pupils making more than expected progress is increasing.
- Pupils continue to make good progress and, by the end of Year 6, they are well prepared for transition to secondary school. Their confidence in reading and mathematics is a particular strength. You are continuing to check the quality of pupils' writing through frequent scrutiny of pupils' books. You are rightly monitoring the progress of pupils who left Key Stage 1 with low outcomes to make sure that they quickly catch up in Year 3 and Year 4.
- Pupils respond very positively to the high expectations for conduct around the school and for learning in class. Bullying is rare and taken very seriously. Pupils want to attend school. Pupils are very keen to take on responsibilities. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength.

- You belong to a range of helpful networks. You attend partnership meetings of Gade Family Services and have joined the local primary headteachers' group. The project with four Hemel Hempstead secondary schools continues to ensure that pupils' achievement, particularly of disadvantaged pupils, is not disrupted when they transfer from Year 6 to Year 7. You provide opportunities for staff to moderate their assessment within school and with staff from other schools. The school hosted an 'able writers' workshop for local primary schools in February 2016. These external initiatives help staff raise their expectations of what pupils can achieve.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- further high-quality training is provided to all staff, including teaching assistants and leaders new to their areas of responsibility, so that the quality of teaching and learning matches that of the best in all year groups.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for Hertfordshire County Council. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gelé  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection, I met with you, your senior leaders, and five governors including the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body. I also met the school's consultant headteacher and the local authority improvement partner. I met a group of pupils and spoke with many during breaktime and in class. We visited all year groups together and I checked your evaluation of teaching and learning. I looked at pupils' work and talked to them about their learning. I analysed recent assessment information about pupils' progress. I reviewed records and procedures about keeping pupils safe and about attendance. I considered the views of 98 parents from Parent View and took account of 20 additional comments from parents and carers. I also spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day. I analysed questionnaire responses from 23 members of staff.